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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001367

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [PTER](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE FOREIGN MINISTERS PREP FOR KHARTOUM
SUMMIT; POSITIONS MOSTLY AT ODDS WITH USG

REF: STATE 34709

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor Michael Corbin for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (SBU) Arab foreign ministers met in Cairo March 4-5 to prepare for a March 28-29 Arab League Summit in Sudan. Among the topics discussed were Iraq, Palestine, Sudan/Darfur, and Arab reform. We understand the meetings were generally uncontentious, with ministers agreeing to support the political process in Iraq, continue financial and political support for the Palestinian Authority, and support African Union efforts to resolve the Darfur conflict. At the upcoming summit, leaders will consider proposals to create an Arab Court of Justice and an Arab Peace and Security Council.

On Iraq, Foreign Minister Zebari told the Ambassador in a meeting on the margins of the ministerial that he was pleased with the draft resolution on Iraq, as well as with Secretary General Moussa's efforts to open an office in Baghdad, pursue a national accord conference in Iraq in June, and press for Iraqi debt forgiveness. Egyptian lobbying to secure a second term for Amre Moussa as Secretary General will be one of the more contentious issues at the summit. End summary.

Iraq: Positive Support for Political Process

12. (C) According to GOE contacts and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, who met with the Ambassador March 5, a draft resolution on Iraq was presented by the Iraqis and was adopted without controversy or argument. Zebari shared with the Ambassador his surprise that "not even the Syrians" presented any objections to the draft. Zebari and AL staff confirmed that the League plans to open a Baghdad office immediately after the summit, and will begin organizing its national accord conference scheduled for early June in Baghdad. The draft resolution calls upon Arabs to continue their support for the political process in Iraq. Zebari told the Ambassador that Moussa committed to him personally to press AL member states ("Gulf states") to forgive Iraq's external debts. While in Cairo, Zebari met Al Azhar Grand Sheikh Tantawi and invited him to Iraq, acknowledging to the Ambassador the positive impact Tantawi's public remarks had inside Iraq after the Samarra attack. Zebari said Arab troops to Iraq was still a "non-starter" for Arab governments, most of which are waiting to see a government formed in Iraq.

Palestinian Authority/Hamas

13. (SBU) Ministers reportedly agreed to present to leaders a draft resolution that calls upon the international community to continue funding for the Palestinian Authority. AL senior staff distinguished between the call to support the PA, versus any one particular group within the Palestinian government (i.e., Hamas). Arab League funding of the PA will continue, AL staff assert, as will further engagement between the AL Secretariat and Hamas. The AL draft resolution stresses adoption by the PA of the Arab Beirut Initiative, and calls upon Israel to respect international agreements and cease "unilateral" measures (e.g., control of Jordan Valley). AL will continue to press with Hamas and PA a message of moderation, support for the formation of a government of national unity, and a rapid return to the Roadmap and direct peace talks with Israel.

Arabs Looking to AU Decision on Darfur, UN Troops

14. (SBU) On Sudan, Ministers agreed to urge full implementation of the north-south peace agreement, and will open an office in Juba to support that process. The draft resolution also expressed support for African Union efforts to resolve the conflict in Darfur, and urged parties to abide by the N,djamena cease-fire agreement of April, 2004. The draft urges the international community to extend financial and technical assistance to the AU to allow it to "continue

its efforts" there. AL Secretariat Chief of Staff told poloff that the AL understands the complexity and sensitivity of trying to transform AMIS into a UN PKO, and will look to the AU's Peace and Security Commission meeting resolution on March 10 in Addis for guidance. The Arab League will hold off on taking any formal position until the Khartoum summit. Still, the draft resolution stresses the importance of Khartoum's acquiescence on UN forces to Darfur, the need to avoid damage to the AU's reputation, and a need to see results on the Abuja peace track.

Sudan Presidency of Summit

15. (C) Arab League and GOE contacts insist there is little chance to deny Sudan the rotating Presidency of the Arab League, which it will assume at the Khartoum summit for the coming year. AL members are unwilling to try to undo a decision made last year in Algiers to allow Sudan to assume the Presidency. While the same contacts acknowledge the AU's rejection of a Bashir Presidency earlier this year, a similar reaction in the Arab League is unlikely, they contend, as political fallout from such a confrontation would be bruising. These contacts echo arguments made privately by our UK colleagues, that allowing Sudan the Presidency would constrain its behavior and force more responsible positions.

Syria/Lebanon

16. (SBU) The draft resolution on Syria and Lebanon reportedly supports the process of delineating borders between the two, particularly Shebaa Farms, although its details remain unclear. The resolution also encourages cooperation on UNSCR 1559, UNIIIC investigation, and improvement of bilateral ties between Syria and Lebanon, according to AL staff. Separate resolutions repeat previous years' criticism of the USG Syria Responsibility Act, and Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights.

UN Issues

17. (SBU) The Arab position on the UN Human Rights Council is to support postponing debate on reform of the Council until this fall. According to AL senior staff, Arab leaders have "concerns" over language in the Chairman's draft on membership, reporting, and voting. The Arab group will formally endorse the rotation of the UN Secretary General position to an Asian candidate, and declared candidates from South Korea and Thailand have been welcomed to address leaders at the Arab Summit. There is no information to suggest that either Venezuelan or Guatemalan reps (GRULAC's UNSC candidates) will be present at the summit. On terrorism, leaders are expected to repeat familiar language to condemn terrorism. On the Danish cartoon issue, leaders are expected to urge the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution aimed at denouncing defamation of religious symbols. There was no specific language on the IAEA or the Iran nuclear portfolio, but leaders are expected to reiterate their call for a weapons of mass destruction-free Middle East.

Miscellaneous

18. (SBU) League staff confirmed that the U.S.-Arab Economic Forum in Houston has been rescheduled for June 26-28, after being postponed due to Hurricane Katrina. Ministers also agreed to further consider Egyptian President Mubarak's proposal to hold additional AL extraordinary summits throughout the year to discuss key regional crises. Last, the issue of a second term for current AL SYG Moussa will likely be contentious, and handled directly by leaders at the summit. We understand Mubarak is lobbying AL members to support a second term for Moussa. Our contacts are saying little on the subject, but we expect the issue to be contentious, particularly among Gulf states.

Arab Reform: Progress Slow

19. (U) The discussion on reform at the AL has focused mainly on efforts to reform the AL bureaucracy itself. Following last year's decision to create an Arab Parliament (based in Syria), leaders this year are expected to consider proposals to create an Arab Court of Justice and an Arab Peace and Security Council. To our knowledge, there has been no discussion of the BMENA process or the Forum for the Future.
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